Is Grinding Your Teeth at Night Affecting Your Sleep? Here's What to Do

Grinding your teeth at night can negatively impact the quality of your sleep. But taking a few simple steps can improve your sleep.

September 8, 2021 By Michael Breus, PhD

When we're awake and stressed out, we may need to remind ourselves to take a deep breath, relax our shoulders, and unclench our jaw. That last one can really sneak up on us sometimes—we may not even realize we're doing it until we have a sore jaw or tooth pain. This is especially worrisome if this happens at night when you're trying to sleep and you may not be able to remind yourself to relax your jaw.

If you wake up in the morning with jaw pain, you may be grinding your teeth at night while you sleep. While an easily treatable condition, grinding your teeth for extended periods can lead to serious and even permanent damage to your teeth and jaw. And you already know that lack of sleep has serious consequences.

Let's take a look at the causes of tooth grinding, as well as what you can do to protect your oral health and sleep soundly.

What Is Bruxism?

Tooth grinding is also known by its medical term: bruxism. Bruxism is a condition where someone involuntarily grinds their teeth or clenches their jaw. It most commonly happens during the day, which is known as daytime bruxism. Tooth grinding can also occur at night, where it's known as nighttime bruxism, or sleep bruxism.

Since nighttime bruxism generally occurs while you are sleeping, it can be much harder for you to realize that you are experiencing the condition. However, the presence of morning jaw pain or a persistent dull headache are good indicators that you may be grinding your teeth while you sleep.

Why Do People Grind Their Teeth?

Tooth grinding can be caused by a variety of factors, including:

- Anxiety or Stress

- An abnormal bite, such as an overbite or an underbite
- Crooked teeth or missing teeth
- Other sleep disorders, including obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)

Interestingly, there's a link between dreams or nightmares about teeth and nocturnal bruxism. The tension you feel in your mouth from grinding your teeth has been associated with these dreams—so if you're experiencing both, it's a good time to talk to your dentist!

Why Is Tooth Grinding Harmful?

I mentioned earlier that jaw pain or dull headaches are common, unpleasant signs of bruxism. Left untreated, grinding your teeth can also have devastating effects on your oral health.

- Worn tooth enamel and increased tooth sensitivity
- Tooth damage, including chipped teeth or fractured teeth
- Loose teeth
- Temporomandibular Joint Disorder (TMD) Some people refer to TMD as TMJ, which actually refers to the Temporomandibular Joint, not the disorders of the joint which grinding and clenching your teeth can cause.

Aside from the damage it can do to your teeth, nighttime bruxism is considered a sleep-related movement disorder, and can make you more likely to have other sleep disorders, such as obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). It can also cause sleep disruptions for you, such as jaw pain, as well as your partner, since they may be able to hear the sounds of your teeth grinding.

Thankfully, there are a number of ways you can treat your teeth grinding and sleep without worry.

How to Treat Nighttime Grinding

If you think that you may be grinding your teeth at night, be sure to contact your dentist. They can check your teeth for signs of excessive wear and help you find treatment options that work for you. This can include devices like a simple mouth guard, or corrective options like an occlusal splint.

An important tool in reducing nighttime teeth grinding and getting a good night's sleep is to reduce your stress. There are lots of ways you can do that, but here are a few I recommend.

1: Relaxation Techniques

I am a firm believer in the power of relaxation techniques for getting a good night of sleep. Whether you've tried meditation, guided imagery, or breathing exercises or not, the right technique can do wonders for stress relief.

Some of my favorites include the Power Down Hour and the 4-7-8 Breathing Technique. Get comfortable and give this a try:

- Inhale for four seconds
- Hold that breath for seven seconds
- Slowly exhale for eight seconds
- Repeat for several rounds, and notice when your body and mind begin to relax. Continue until you feel more relaxed.

Also, try to reduce your exposure to blue light at least 90 minutes before bed, and don't consume any media that might cause stress or anxiety right before you go to sleep. That probably means ruling out the horror and action movies, and even the news before bed.

A little relaxation can go a long way in getting the deep, restful sleep you need each night. Test the breathing technique, and especially the Power Down Hour to see what works best for you, and enjoy your good night's sleep.

2: Improve Your Sleep Hygiene

Sleep hygiene and relaxation techniques go hand in hand— together they can do great things for your rest, but relaxation techniques won't be fully effective unless you exercise proper sleep hygiene. Here are a few easy changes you can make to your bedtime routine for better rest.

- Keep a consistent sleep schedule— go to bed at the same time every night, and wake up at the same time each morning
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol at least a few hours before bed
- Put away all electronic devices— including smartphones, computers, tablets, and TV's— at least 60 to 90 minutes before bedtime to ensure your brain produces enough melatonin for quality sleep

3: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Our lifestyles can be major contributors to stress, which can also have an effect on our oral health. There is a correlation between chronic stress and bruxism, but this can be reduced with the right treatment.

Not only is cognitive behavioral therapy an effective treatment for insomnia (CBT-I), but it's also effective against stress, anxiety, and by extension, tooth grinding.

Through the use of journaling and self-reflection, cognitive behavioral therapy teaches patients to process their thoughts, stop the cycle of negative or stressful thinking, and find healthy and

productive ways to cope with their anxieties.

If you think cognitive behavioral therapy would be an effective treatment for you, get in touch with your doctor and insurance provider to see what options are available to you.

Nighttime teeth grinding can be an annoying and potentially harmful condition to have, but once you know you have it, there are so many different ways to treat it.

If you're worried that your sleep bruxism is caused or being exacerbated by a sleep disorder like obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), it's important to contact your doctor or a sleep specialist ASAP to check for any underlying conditions and see what treatment options are right for you. To find accredited experts and sleep centers near you, check out this tool by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine.

Life's stresses can be overwhelming sometimes, but as long as you stop to take a deep breath, relax your shoulders, and unclench your jaw, it's much easier to take things on as they come.

This post originally appeared on The Sleep Doctor on June 4 2021. It is republished with permission.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/grinding-teeth-night-affecting-sleep